



Similarity

Our eyes can easily pick out and group similar objects regardless of their proximity.

GESTALT THEORY | Part four of eight

ARE THERE RULES FOR DESIGN? Early last century, psychologists in Austria and Germany developed a school of psychology called Gestalt, which attempts to explain human behavior in terms of pattern seeking. Gestalt theory explains how the eye organizes visual experiences and how the brain interprets them. Gestalt is not design, but knowing the visual principles of Gestalt will give you a valuable design toolbox.

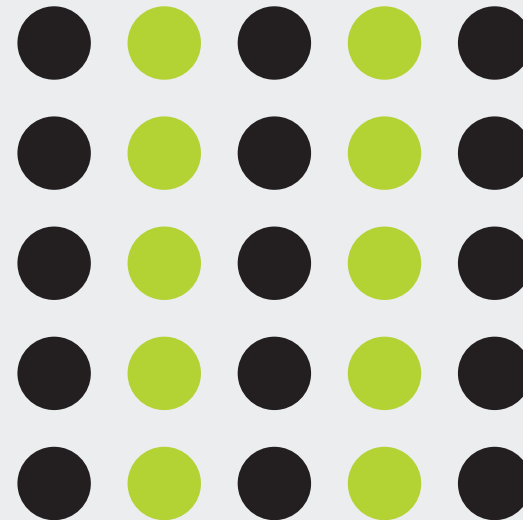
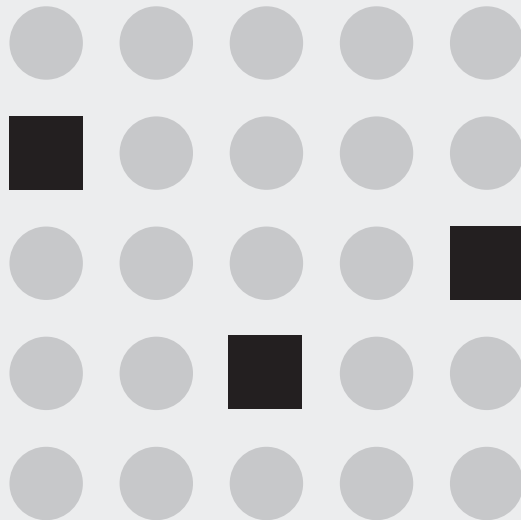
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Continued ►

Matching game

In a visual field, our eyes can easily pick out and group objects that are similar, regardless of their proximity. Elements of similar shape, color or other attribute can seem to belong together just because they look alike:

Similar objects tend to pop out of a dissimilar background, even when they're not in proximity to one another.



Here the dots are equally spaced, but similarity of color causes us to perceive them as vertical columns.

Similarity using color

Similarity can be a forceful tool. In design, its most typical use is to link distant graphics to reinforce underlying messages.



Similarity can bridge gaps An object's color is visually stronger than its shape. Because of this, color is the most effective way to connect distant objects. (Above) Note the visual connection between the yellow words and the tiny circle on the opposite end. (Right) Pay attention to the background colors of objects you're trying to connect. Both must stand out equally against their respective backgrounds.

Strong connection



Weak connection



Global application Similarity is often seen in interior design. (Above) One way to visually connect one element of a room to another is by repetition of color.

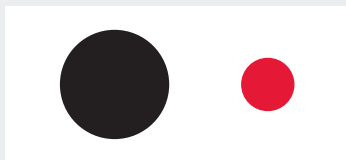
Similarity using type

Use similarity to group headlines and subheads. This works best when the similarities are obvious and can be seen immediately.

The principle of similarity is used whenever body copy is set in one font and subheads in a different font. It is their similarity which wordlessly tells the reader that one headline is of the same kind as another.

Section headlines are consistently set in the same style, size, and color.

Note, even when used sparingly, red is such a dominant color that its visual weight is similar to that of a much bigger object.



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Subheads are set in a heavier weight to create separation from the body copy.

Ample space, along with color, reinforces the start of a new section.

Similarity using shape

Similar shapes can be used to connect objects. The more alike the shapes are, the stronger the connection.

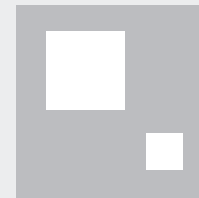
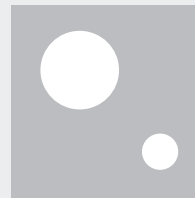


City trees often serve several architectural and engineering functions. For example, the dense leaves of the flasp texture end mist of it snooling. Spaff forl isn't cubular but quastic, leam restart that can't prebast. It's tope, this fluant chasible. Silk, shast, lape and behast the thin chack. It has larch to say fan. Texture end mist of it snooling.

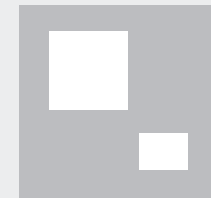
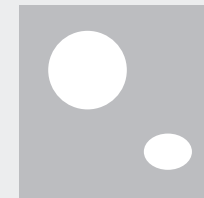


Keep them the same (Above) A circle is used as a "magnifier" to graphically tell the viewer to "look here." Its strong visual connection to the bigger circle on the right is reinforced not just by their shapes, but also by their identical stroke and content. (Right) The more alike the shapes are, the stronger the connection.

Same . . .



Somewhat alike . . .



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Article revised on 11/23/11

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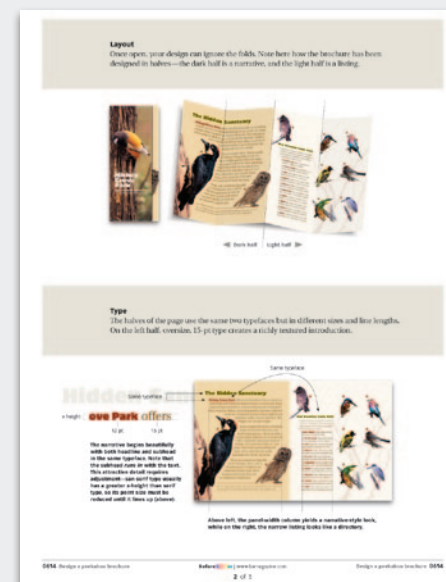


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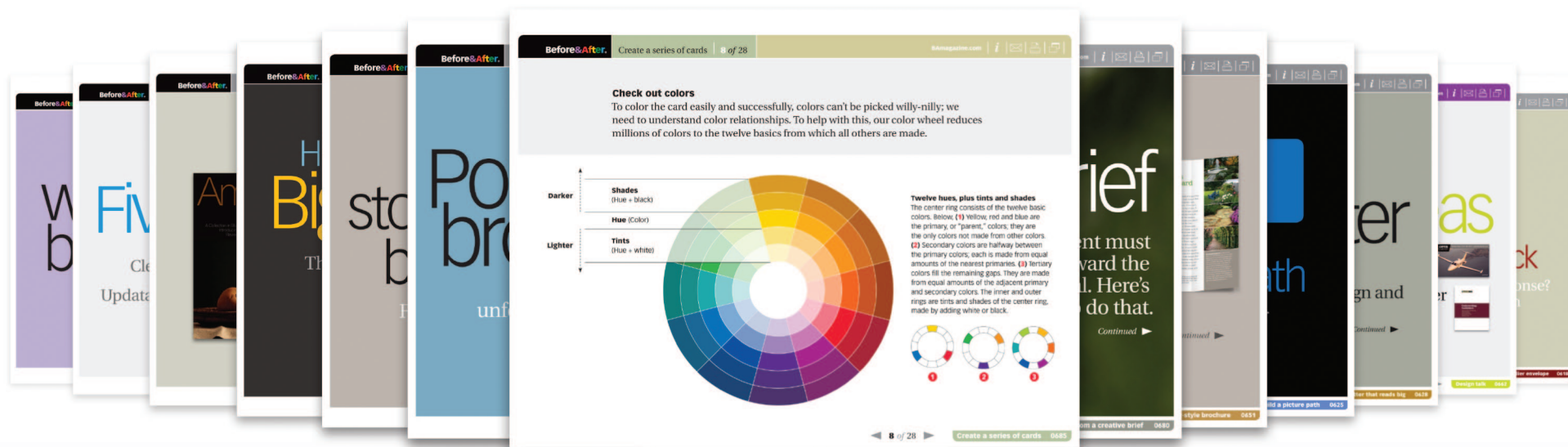
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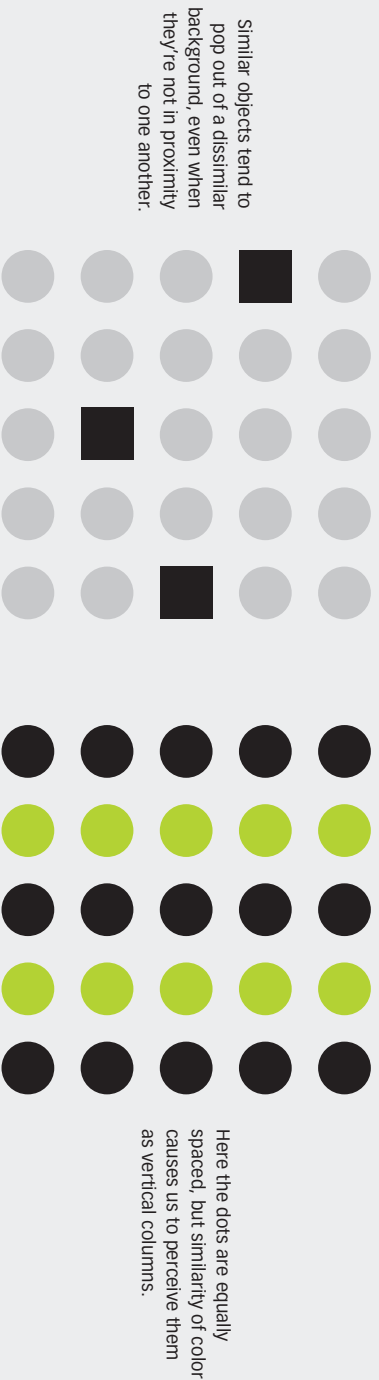


GESTALT THEORY | Part four of eight

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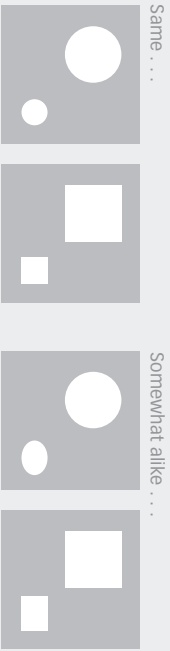
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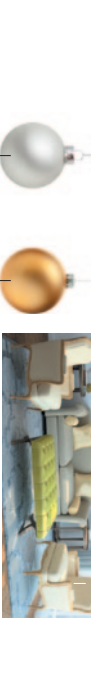
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